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ABSTRACT

Data in this population bulletin indicate that in comparison with children of previous generations, today's youngsters are apt to have fewer siblings, and more likely to come from a broken home, have a working mother, and pass time as a latchkey kid. More children are in child care than in the past, and there has been a significant move toward center-based care. Preschoolers, particularly those from relatively well-off families, are increasingly enrolled in prekindergarten. Declining family size and recent American prosperity have created material well-being for most of today's children. But the development of an underclass has also increased the number of children trapped in poverty. Stagnant wages of the working poor and the growing number of mother-only households have exacerbated income inequality among children. The decline in educational achievement scores of the 1970s has ended, and average school performance has improved in the 1980s. An increased number of students, especially blacks, completed high school in the 1980s. The physical health of the average American child has improved dramatically since 1960. But the picture is marred by the problematic future of the children of the underclass and the uncertain psychological impact of America's transformed family life. (RH)

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America's Children: Mixed Prospects

By Suzanne M. Bianchi

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Abstract—The prospects of U.S. children are uneven and uncertain. Today's youngsters are more apt to have fewer siblings, come from a broken home, have a working mother and pass time as a "latchkey kid." More children are in child care than in the past and there has been a significant move toward center-based care. Increasingly, preschool-age children, particularly from relatively well-off families, are enrolled in pre-kindergarten educational settings.

Declining family size and recent American prosperity have created material well-being for most of today's children. But the development of an underclass has also increased the number of children trapped in poverty. The stagnant wages of the "working poor" and the growing number of mother-only households have exacerbated income inequality among children from different family circumstances.

The decline in educational achievement scores, which characterized the 1970s, has, for the moment at least, ended and the average school performance even improved slightly in the 1980s. In addition, more students, especially black students, completed high school in the 1980s. And the physical health of the average American child has improved dramatically since 1960.

Most American children lead happy, healthy lives and several trends portend well for the future of most youngsters. But the picture is marred by the problematic future of the children of the underclass and the uncertain psychological impact of America's transformed family life.

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America's Children: Mixed Prospects

By Suzanne M. Bianchi

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The author thanks Rosalind Bruno, Donald Hernandez, Mark Littman, Larry Long, Judith Seltzer, and Janet Yax for review and comments and Mary Kent of the PRB staff for editorial assistance in preparing this Bulletin. *The ongoing research support of the Center for Demographic Studies of the Census Bureau, in particular the assistance of Pamela Smith, is also gratefully acknowledged.*

Children are beloved by parents because they enrich the present and promise an unbroken continuation of life and family. They are valued by society because they embody the future. Governments, as well as families, accept a responsibility for ensuring the well-being of children by investing in education and by trying to provide a safe and wholesome environment in which they can live. But these investment costs are escalating. A number of demographic, social, and economic trends are sorely testing the public commitment to children's needs, and possibly eroding the well-being of some groups of U.S. children.

The rapid growth of the elderly share of the U.S. population may undermine the political viability of child-related public expenditures as the needs of the elderly compete with education and child care for a shrinking pool of public funds. The rising costs of housing and college prevent many families from providing their children with quality homes and college educations. The movement of middle-class families to the suburbs has concentrated poor and minority children in central cities all too often dominated by violence and drugs.

Social changes—in particular the high divorce rate and increase in out-of-wedlock births—have placed more children in single-parent homes, usually headed by their mother, for part of their formative years. And female-headed families are much more likely to be poor. In 1988, one in five U.S. children was living in poverty. The entrance of more and more mothers of young children into the paid labor force has placed more children in the care of other relatives or nonfamily members.

These dramatic trends raise several important questions about the public versus private role in caring for children. The public investment in children varies tremendously among countries, even within the industrialized world. Education is recognized as a necessary governmental responsibility in most countries. Some European countries, concerned about low birth rates and impending population decline, also offer sizable financial incentives to encourage couples to have children, and provide strong support systems and generous social insurance benefits for families with

children.[1] In the United States, aside from education and related programs, childrearing has traditionally been considered the responsibility of the family.

It is difficult to assess the value of children to individuals and families, or whether that value has changed over time. Most individuals seem to want children, but the actual number desired has fallen, probably due to broad social and economic trends affecting the costs and benefits of having children rather than a change in the intrinsic liking for or the value of children. As effective birth control has become widely available, couples may have only the number of children they want.

Public support for education and other programs to benefit children and families may diminish as smaller percentages of American households have children. In 1988, only 38 percent of all households included children under age 18.[2] The majority of adults do not live with children on a day-to-day basis, although many of these individuals are grandparents, aunts, or uncles, and, hence, have some appreciation for the needs of children.

Samuel Preston, former president of the Population Association of America, pointed out in 1984 that the situation of children should have improved since the 1960s because—as their numbers declined—there was less competition and there were more resources available per child; yet, many socioeconomic indicators suggested just the opposite.

Preston argued that public support and investment in dependent segments of the population was actually greater when a population group was increasing in size. He contrasted the well-being of children with that of the other "dependent" segment of the population, the elderly, a group that has been growing dramatically in size and has fared quite well while children have not.[3] In general, subsequent research has confirmed that the economic situation of children has worsened relative to the elderly, although the absolute level of well-being

Image Productions

The elderly have improved their economic situation in the 1980s, while children have not.

of children has not necessarily deteriorated.[4]

Preston has focused much needed attention on the lives of children and pointed out that if, indeed, the well-being of children was being neglected, there would be high social costs when those children reached adolescence and adulthood. The social and demographic trends which have led to the deterioration in the status of children are not likely to reverse any time soon.

Fertility is likely to remain low, and hence the size of the population under age 18 will decline as a proportion of the total population. Not only will the children's share of the population decrease but more of those children will be minorities. Americans will have to realize that they have a stake in seeing all children, not just their own, adequately cared for, properly housed, and well educated.

Finally, the family circumstances of children have been permanently transformed through high rates of divorce and the increasing labor force participation of mothers. Family disruption, which places many children at economic risk, is likely to remain high. The system for caring for young children and for transferring income, both privately and publicly, from the working popula-

tion to the dependent population will have to adapt to a new social reality in order to allow all children the opportunity for a productive adult life.

How children are faring—economically, socially, psychologically, and educationally—continues to be an important question. And how much government involvement is needed to assure at least a minimum level of well-being for all children continues to be debated.

Changing Numbers of U.S. Children

During 1940, the year before the United States entered World War II, about 2.6 million American babies were born. As the war ended, the now famous "baby boom" generation was launched. The number of births jumped to 3.6 million by 1950 and crested at around 4.3 million in the early 1960s. The number of U.S. births in 1960 was two-thirds higher than in 1940.

As public institutions, particularly schools, were beginning to adjust to the increased number of children, births started a spiral downward, bottoming out at 3.1 million in 1975. Even at this low point, the number of births was 23 percent higher than in 1940. Schools built during the 1960s to handle the burgeoning number of students were closed or converted to other uses because there were not enough children to fill them. Educators and city planners were on a roller coaster ride: the problems and solutions of one decade were opposite those of the next. And there was considerable apprehension about what would happen in the 1970s and 1980s as the baby boomers began having their own children.

Even if baby boom couples had only two births, on average, demographers knew that the number of births would go up because there would be so many women of childbearing age. But how much would births increase? Baby boomers waited longer to get married and start having children than did their parents; consequently, the number of births continued to decline. Some demographers projected that 25 or even 30 percent of the baby boomers would never have children, a record high percentage.[5]

By the close of the 1980s, however, it became clear that the baby boom couples had simply delayed childbearing. Since the mid-1970s, the birth rates for women in their 20s have been relatively stable whereas the rates for women in their 30s have increased by one-third or more.[6] As we enter the 1990s, a large cohort of women is in its 30s.[7] While the birth rates for this group of some 20 million women are far below the high rates during the baby boom, the projections of childlessness made just a few years ago are probably too high: 15 to 18 percent of women rather than 25 to 30 percent will not have children. Childless women in their early 30s today are much more likely to have (or still plan to have) a child than were women of the same age just 10 or 15 years ago.[8]

Although the U.S. birth rate has remained below the replacement level of two children per couple, the number of births has increased steadily since the mid-1970s. The National Center for Health Statistics reports 3.8 million births for 1987, 3.9 million in 1988, and provisional data for 1989 suggest that the number of births exceeded 4 million for the first time since the baby boom. More significant, the U.S. birth rate itself may have increased slightly in recent years. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR), the average number of births a woman has during her childbearing years, has been around 1.8 since the late 1970s, well below the 2.1 level needed to replace the population. In 1987, it rose to 1.9 and provisional figures show it close to 2.0 in 1989. That fertility increased at the end of the 1980s, after remaining stagnant for nearly two decades, surprised many demographers and threw off popu-

lation projections based on a continuation of the 1.8 TFR into the next century. The middle series (or most likely scenario) of the Census Bureau's last set of projections, published in January 1989, already show too few children under five for 1990.

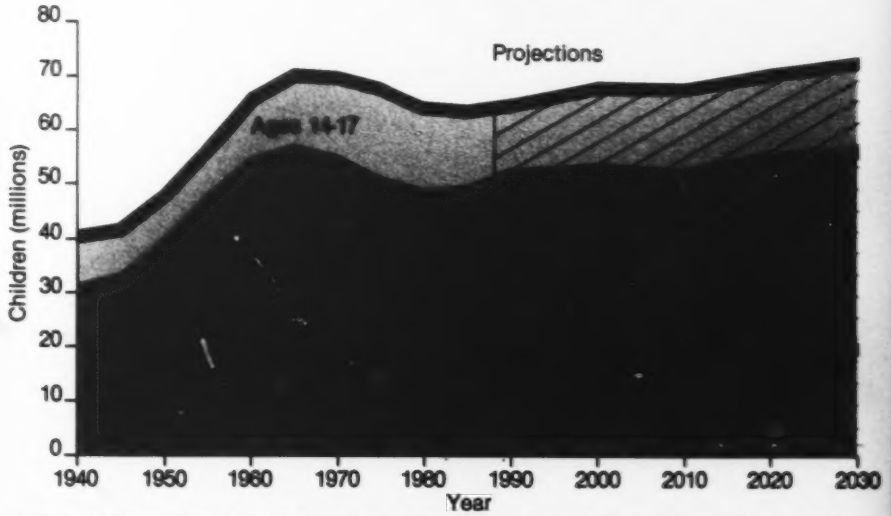
The number of births will decline in the future as the women of the large baby boom generation move out of the childbearing ages and are replaced by the smaller cohorts of women born during the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, just as the number of births did not start increasing when demographers expected in the early 1970s, the recent rise in births shows that baby boom women have not finished having their children quite as early as expected either.

What does all this mean in terms of the size of future cohorts of children? The number of children under age five increased by 11 percent between 1980 and 1988 and is projected to crest around 1990 and then decline by 2000. The elementary school-age population started to increase again in the late 1980s, and may continue a slow ascent into the next century. The high school-age population, in decline since the early 1980s due to the low numbers of births in the 1970s, will start to rise again in the 1990s (see Figure 1).

Perhaps more important to the status of U.S. children, the ratio of children to the population of working age has slipped from a high of 66 per 100 in 1965 to 42 per 100 in 1988, and is expected to decline further, perhaps reaching 36 per 100 in 2030.

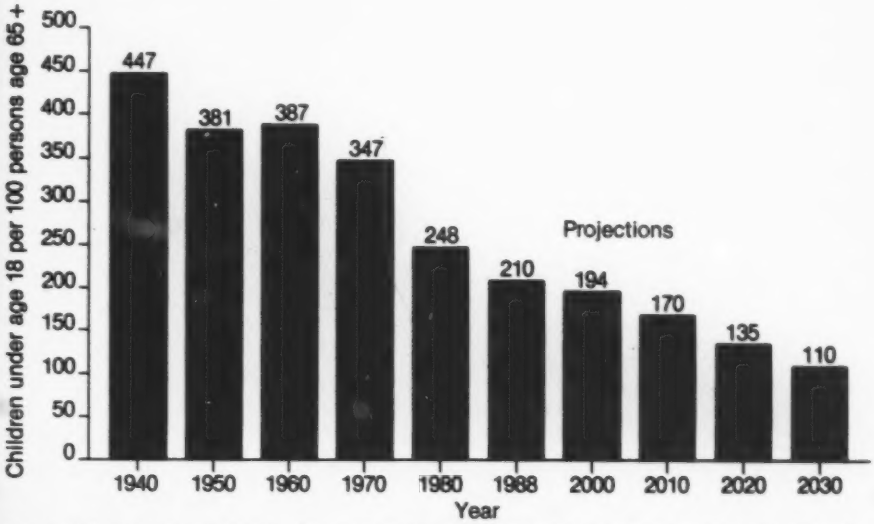
The ratio of children to the elderly has dropped even more dramatically. In 1940, when mortality at older ages was high by today's standards, there were 447 children under age 18 for every 100 persons over age 65. This ratio has declined steadily, although, in 1988, chil-

Figure 1. U.S. Children by Age Group, 1940–1988, and Projections to 2030



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-25, Numbers 1018, 952, and 1045; and author's estimates based on published and unpublished data.

Figure 2. Ratio of Children to the Elderly, 1940–1988, and Projections to 2030



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-25, Numbers 1018, 952, and 1045; and author's estimates based on published and unpublished data.

dren still outnumbered the elderly by more than two to one. By the year 2030, with the older population continuing to grow faster than the younger, there will be nearly equal numbers of American children and elderly (see Figure 2).

A Transformation of Family Life

A growing proportion of U.S. children see their parents divorce and spend much of their childhood without a father at home. This trend has characterized all racial and ethnic groups, but differences between the living arrangements of black and white children have grown during the past three decades.

Between 1950 and 1981, the number of divorces increased from 385,000 to 1.2 million annually and the divorce rate more than doubled. Since 1981, the number of divorces and the divorce rate have leveled but remain high. In 1986, there were 1,178,000 divorces, 4.9 per 1,000 population.[9] Provisional data suggest a slightly lower rate (4.8) for 1988 and 1989.

Catherine Miller

At least one-half of today's children will live in a single-parent family before age 18.

Box 1. Adopted Children

Do adopted children differ from other children? In 1988, an estimated 1 million children were living with adoptive parents. Black children are just as likely to be adopted as children of white, Asian or other races, although blacks are more likely to be adopted by a relative. Most adoptees are native-born Americans; of the approximately 114,000 children adopted in 1986, 91 percent were born in the United States. The number of foreign adoptions appears to have increased in recent years. In 1986, as many as 10,000 foreign babies were adopted, up from about 5,000 in the early 1980s.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, roughly 50,000 children per year were adopted by unrelated parents, a significant decline since 1970 when a record 89,000 children were adopted. In addition to the generally lower fertility during those years, two factors account for much of the decline in adoptions since 1970: easier access to abortion to prevent unplanned births and the growing tendency of unmarried mothers to keep their babies rather than give them up for adoption.

In 1987, 1.7 percent of women ages 20 to 44 had ever adopted a child, compared to 2.2 percent in 1982, according to interview data from the National Center for Health Statistics. White and black women were just as likely to have adopted a child, but both were more likely to adopt than Hispanic women.

While bearing a child is a private matter, often reflecting the decision of only two people, adoption entails a very public statement of intent and scrutiny of a couple's (or individual's) finances and personal living situation. In 1987, 41 percent of adoptions were arranged by a public agency, 35 percent by a private agency, and an additional 24 percent through a lawyer.

Most children are adopted when they are babies. Among adopted children of all ages, 82 percent had been placed with adoptive parents prior to turning one year old, but the percentage being placed as infants may have been lower in the 1980s (73 percent) than in the 1970s (83 percent).

How do adopted children fare compared to other children? The sketchy evidence available suggests that the parents who adopt unrelated children tend to be older, more educated, and have higher incomes than the average couple. Since many couples adopt only after spending some years trying to have their own child, then making their way through the adoption process, they tend to have been married longer and are more likely to have well-established careers than other parents. Also, since finances enter into adoption approval, adoptive parents tend to be better-off financially.

All these factors work to the benefit of the child's well-being. Adopted children tend to live with higher income families than the average, and an overwhelming majority are reported to be in very good health. While we have little evidence about other aspects of well-being, adopted children at least begin their new lives with certain advantages.

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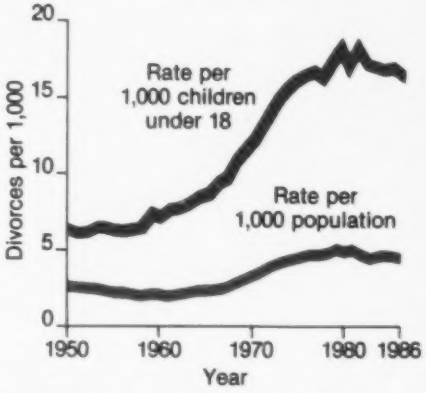
Since 1972, more than 1 million children each year have seen their parents divorce, a three-fold increase since 1950. But the percentage of children whose parents divorce has risen even faster. In the 1950s, only six out of every 1,000 children experienced parental divorce in a given year but in the 1980s, this rate varied between 17 and 19 per 1,000 (see Figure 3).

Another trend that has altered children's family lives is the increase in the number of children born to unmarried mothers. In 1987, one in four births in the U.S. was to an unmarried mother—up from only one in 20 births in 1960 (see Figure 4).

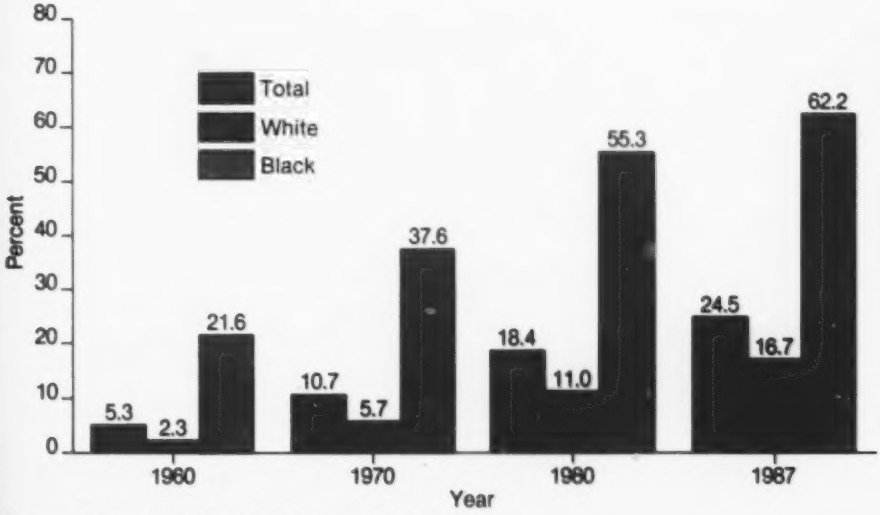
Because of the high divorce rate and the increase in out-of-wedlock births, a smaller proportion of children are living in two-parent households. In 1960, 88 percent of children lived with two parents, but by 1988, this percentage had

Figure 3. Divorce Rates for the U.S. Population and Divorces per 1,000 Children under Age 18, 1950–1986



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *Monthly Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 38, No. 2.

Figure 4. Percentage of Births to Unmarried Mothers, by Race: 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1987



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, published data.

dropped to 73 (see Table 1). But only about 60 percent lived with their two biological parents in 1988; the remainder lived with a parent and stepparent.[10]

Between 1960 and 1988, the percentage of children living with one parent, usually their mother, increased from 9 to 24 percent. The percentage living with their father only increased from 1 to 3 percent between 1960 and 1988. During this period, 3 to 4 percent of children lived with neither parent, but most of these resided with some other relative.

Proportionately fewer children today than 30 years ago can count on growing up in a household that includes both their mother and their father. Demographers, using life table (actuarial) techniques to project current trends into the future, estimate that at least one-half—perhaps as many as 60 percent—of the children born today will spend some part of their childhood living in single-parent families. Demographer Larry Bumpass has estimated that, among children born to married mothers in the 1963–65

Table 1. Living Arrangements of Children under 18, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1988

Living arrangement	1960	1970	1980	1988
	(numbers in thousands)			
All races				
Children under 18	63,727	69,162	63,427	63,179
Percent living with:				
Two parents	87.7	85.2	76.7	72.7
One parent	9.1	11.9	19.7	24.3
Mother only	8.0	10.8	18.0	21.4
Father only	1.1	1.1	1.7	2.9
Other relatives	2.5	2.2	3.1	2.3
Nonrelatives only	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7
White				
Children under 18	55,077	58,790	52,242	51,030
Percent living with:				
Two parents	90.9	89.5	82.7	78.9
Mother only	6.1	7.8	13.5	16.0
Father only	1.0	0.9	1.6	2.9
Other	1.9	1.8	2.2	2.2
Black				
Children under 18	8,650	9,422	9,375	9,699
Percent living with:				
Two parents	67.0	58.5	42.2	38.6
Mother only	19.9	29.5	43.9	51.1
Father only	2.0	2.3	1.9	3.0
Other	11.1	9.7	12.0	7.4
Hispanic				
Children under 18	na	4,006	5,459	6,786
Percent living with:				
Two parents	na	77.7	75.4	66.3
Mother only	na	na	19.6	27.2
Father only	na	na	1.5	3.0
Other	na	na	3.5	3.6

Notes: Excludes persons under 18 years old who were maintaining households or families. Black = nonwhite in 1960. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

na—not available.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1988," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 433, Table A-4.

period, about one in five experienced their mother's marital separation before reaching age 16. Twice the proportion of children (over two in five) born in the 1977–79 period will experience family disruption.[11]

Racial and Ethnic Differences

Perhaps the most striking changes in children's family lives are the persistent, and increasing, differences between white and minority children. The proportion of white children living with two parents declined by 12 percentage points between 1960 and 1988, but declined by 28 percentage points for blacks (see Table 1). In 1988, almost four in five white children lived in two-parent families compared with about two in five black children. The percentage of Hispanic children in two-parent families has also slipped, from 78 percent in 1970 (the first year for which we have data) to 66 percent in 1988.

Black children who do live with two parents are less likely than whites to be living with both biological parents.[12] Only about 27 percent of black children, compared with around 66 percent of white children, lived in a household which included both their biological mother and father in 1988 (see Figure 5, page 12).

The likelihood of spending all or part of childhood in a mother-only family is much greater for black than for white children. In 1988, the majority of black children (51 percent) lived with their mother only, compared with 16 percent of white and 27 percent of Hispanic children. Life table estimates based on data from the late 1970s suggest that 42 percent of white children, compared with 86 percent of black children, will live with their mother only for part of their childhood.

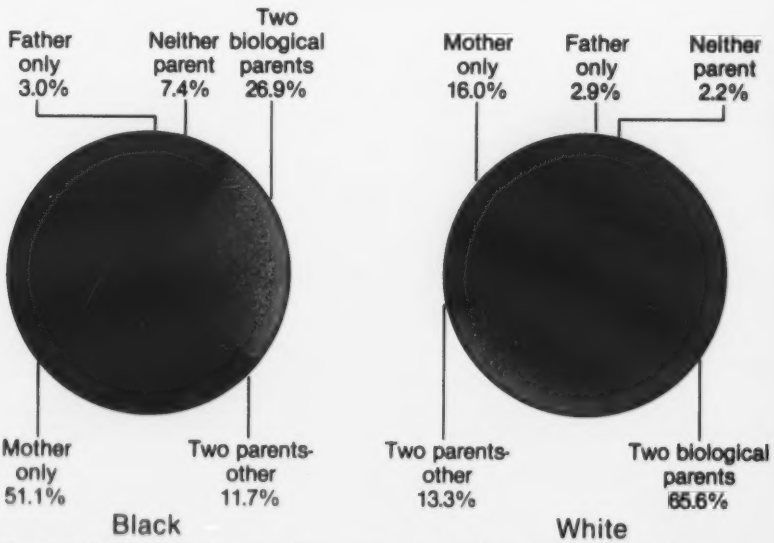
The proportion of children who lived with their father only (3 percent) was similar for whites, blacks, and Hispanics by 1988. About 7 percent of black children, compared with 2 percent of white and 4 percent of Hispanic children, lived in a household which included neither parent in 1988. Most of these children were living with grandparents or other relatives.

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

Black children are more likely than white to live with their mother only, or with a stepparent.

Black children are also much more likely to live with a never-married mother. In 1987, 62 percent of black babies in the U.S. were born to unmarried mothers compared with 17 percent of white babies born that year (see Figure 4, page 9). However, an increased proportion of single parents of both races have never married. Between 1960 and 1988, the proportion of white children living with a never-married single parent grew from less than 2 percent to 18 percent, with much of the increase occurring in the 1980s. Over the same period, the percentage of black children in single-parent families who lived with a never-married parent grew from 10 to 54 percent. Among Hispanic children,

Figure 5. Living Arrangements of Black and White Children, 1988



Note: Data from June 1985 Current Population Survey were used to estimate the proportion of children who were living with two biological parents.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 433; and Series P-23, No. 162.

for whom data are available only for the 1980s, there was also an increase. By 1988, one-third of Hispanic children in single-parent families lived with a never-married parent.

This increase in the proportion of children with never-married mothers has negative consequences for the well-being of children because these mothers tend to have lower incomes and higher unemployment than other women, even other single mothers. The average family income of children who live with a never-married mother is only around 40 percent of that for children who live with either a divorced or a widowed mother (see Table 2). Widowed parents and their children often receive Social Security income and other survivor benefits which tend to be much more generous than the public assistance available to never-married mothers and their children. Children of divorce are much more likely to receive economic support from their fathers.

In addition, never-married mothers are usually younger and have less education than other single mothers, and they often have other characteristics that make it harder for them to get and hold well-paying jobs. Over one-third of children living with a never-married mother have a mother under age 25. Only 55 percent of these children lived with a mother who had completed high school, compared with 80 percent of children living with a divorced mother. Only about one-third of children with never-married mothers have a mother who is employed, compared with over 70 per-

cent of children with divorced mothers and almost one-half of children with separated or widowed mothers.

Many children with never-married mothers receive financial help from other working adults (usually another relative) in the same household. For 45 percent of children living with a never-married mother, there were other adults living in their household in 1988—an apparent increase since the 1960s. This figure was considerably lower (around 34 percent) for children living with divorced or separated mothers. Other adult earners often contribute a significant component of the income available to children in single-parent families. This may have dampened the economic disadvantages brought by the increase in the number of children born to never-married mothers.[13]

In sum, the increase in the percentage of children growing up in single-parent families, and the widening racial differences in living arrangements, are of concern because of the negative economic consequences. A growing body of research points to long-term, negative consequences for children in social and academic realms as well.

Children and Poverty

Much of the research on children's economic well-being has focused on children in families with the fewest financial resources. Official poverty statistics, available back to 1959, show that children have consistently had a higher probability of being poor than adults of working age. Three dimensions of children's experience of poverty are important to highlight. The first is age—how children's likelihood of being poor compares with working-age adults and the elderly over time. A second is the trend in the poverty status of children in two-parent families as compared with children in one-parent families. Third, closely tied to the family structure dimension, is the racial differential in childhood experience of poverty.

In the 1960s, both the number and the percent in poverty declined substantially for persons under age 18. Between 1959

Table 2. Selected Family Characteristics of Children in Mother-Only Families by Marital Status of Mother, 1988

	Divorced	Separated, spouse absent	Widowed	Never married
	(numbers in thousands)			
Children under 18 years	5,010	3,371	838	4,302
Percent with mother under age 25	4.6	10.4	2.5	35.2
Percent with mother who has completed high school	80.1	62.5	63.2	54.9
Percent with mother who has completed college	11.6	7.2	10.0	2.0
Percent with mother who is employed	71.4	49.1	45.8	34.0
Percent living in households with adults other than mother	33.8	33.2	40.6	45.3
Mean family income	$16,383	$10,294	$17,868	$7,054

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1988." *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 433, Table 9.

and 1969, the number in poverty dropped from 18 million to 10 million and the official poverty rate fell from 27 to 14 percent (see Table 3). During the 1970s, as economic growth slowed, the number of children in poverty leveled off at around 10 million. The poverty rate was nearly 16 percent for the population under age 18. After 1978, the number of children in poverty rose, peaking at almost 14 million in 1983, coinciding with the severe economic recession of the early 1980s. Poverty rates have declined since, but in 1988, an estimated 20 percent of children lived in poverty. In 1988, 12.6 million children lived below the poverty level, one-quarter more than the number of children in poverty throughout the 1970s.

The rise in the poverty rates of children during the 1980s is in sharp contrast to the situation for those at the other end of the age distribution. The poverty rate for persons over age 65, which exceeded the rate for children until the mid-1970s, declined to 12 percent in 1988. However, compared to younger Americans, a high proportion of the elderly have incomes just over the poverty line (incomes 100 to 125 percent of the poverty threshold).[14] One factor that has aided the situation for the elderly is that Social Security benefits are indexed to the Consumer Price Index and have risen with inflation.

For children, on the other hand, the decline in poverty halted in the early 1970s, and the economic situation of children at the bottom of the income distribution has deteriorated. Why has the situation worsened for children at greatest economic risk? Part of the story has to do with children in mother-only families. The continued growth in the number of children in these families combined with some increase in the likelihood that they will live in poverty (rates in the 1980s have been higher than they were in the late 1970s) has brought more

Table 3. Number and Percent below Poverty among Children, Working-Age Adults, and the Elderly, by Race for Selected Years, 1959–1988

	Children under age 18		Working-age adults ages 18–64		Elderly age 65 and over	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
All races						
1959	17,552	27.3	16,457	17.0	5,481	35.2
1969	9,691	14.0	9,669	8.7	4,787	25.3
1979	10,377	16.4	12,043	8.9	3,682	15.2
1983	13,911	22.3	17,767	12.4	3,625	13.8
1988	12,584	19.7	15,812	10.5	3,482	12.0
White						
1979	6,193	11.8	8,110	6.9	2,911	13.3
1983	8,862	17.5	12,347	10.0	2,776	11.7
1988	7,483	14.6	10,867	8.3	2,595	10.0
Black						
1979	3,833	41.2	3,478	23.8	740	36.2
1983	4,398	46.7	4,694	29.2	791	36.0
1988	4,364	44.2	4,278	24.4	785	32.2
Hispanic						
1979	1,535	26.0	1,232	16.8	154	26.8
1983	2,312	38.1	2,148	22.5	173	22.1
1988	2,653	37.9	2,501	20.7	225	22.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1988," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 166, Table 19.

Table 4. Poverty Status of Families with Children under Age 18 by Family Type for Selected Years, 1959–1988

	Total families (thousands)	Families below poverty	
		Number (thousands)	Percent
Female-headed families, no husband present			
1959*	2,544	1,525	59.9
1969*	3,384	1,519	44.9
1979	6,035	2,392	39.6
1983	6,622	3,122	47.1
1988	7,361	3,294	44.7
Married-couple families			
1959*	24,448	3,818	15.6
1969*	26,443	1,707	6.5
1979	25,615	1,573	6.1
1983	25,216	2,557	10.1
1988	25,598	1,847	7.2

*Data for 1959 and 1969 include a small number of male-headed, single-parent families.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1988," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 166, Table 20.

of these children into poverty.

Although the poverty rate declined for children living in mother-only families during the 1960s, the number of children living in these families was growing. The greater number of children in mother-only families—families at higher risk of poverty—offset the decreased probability of being poor among these families. The poverty rate for families maintained by a woman declined from 60 to 45 percent during the 1960s, yet the number of poor mother-only families stood at 1.5 million in 1969, virtually unchanged from the number of such families in poverty in 1959 (see Table 4). The 1970s witnessed a substantial growth in the number of families maintained by a woman and a resulting 57 percent growth in the number of poor mother-only families with children.

Children who live in mother-only families have almost a one in two chance of being in poverty in contrast to a less than one in ten chance for children living with two-parents. Children in mother-only families suffer economically from three factors: their mothers usually have low earnings, their fathers often do not contribute to their support, and public assistance benefits have not kept up with inflation during the 1980s.[15]

Another part of the explanation for the growing poverty of children in the 1980s lies in the increased number of two-parent families in poverty. Poverty fluctuations for children in two-parent families

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The income disparity between more and less affluent children may have worsened in the 1980s.

parallel changes in real wages of men who work full time. According to Harvard researchers Mary Jo Bane and David Ellwood, the increase in the poverty of children in two-parent families during the 1980s is due largely to the stagnation in wages of fathers. Poverty rates for children in these families might have been even higher in recent years but for three compensating trends: increased labor income provided by working mothers, smaller families, and delayed childbearing. Poor two-parent families are often the "working poor." Most do not qualify for any public assistance except food stamps; many are not covered by health insurance. Bane and Ellwood argue that, after public and private transfers, children in poor two-parent families may be the poorest of the poor.

Children in two-parent families, however, are less likely to be persistently poor than are children in one-parent families, which eases the lack of public assistance income available to these families.[16] Also, poor children living in two-parent families are much more likely than those in mother-only families to have at least one parent in the labor force. In 1988, nearly one-half of poor female-headed families contained no working adults; the comparable percentage for poor two-parent families was 17 percent.[17]

The financial and emotional stress associated with a father's unemployment can lead to marital disruption, ultimately increasing long-term childhood poverty by moving children into mother-only families. Data from the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation show that two-parent families that experience marital breakup often have endured more unemployment of the father and greater financial difficulties than intact families.

Another important characteristic of childhood poverty is the substantial racial disparity. The racial gap in poverty has decreased since 1959, but the growing proportion of black children living in mother-only families has sustained racial differences in childhood poverty because such families are more likely to be poor.[18] In 1988, 56 percent of black mother-only families with children were poor and over one-half of black children lived in mother-only families. The poverty rate in white mother-only families was also very high (38 percent) but only 16 percent of white children lived in mother-only families.[19] A child's likelihood of residing in poverty was clearly much greater, whether white or black, if he or she lived in a household maintained by a woman rather than in a two-parent household.

A large racial gap persists even for two-parent families; the likelihood of black families living in poverty was twice that of white families. In 1988, 6 percent of white two-parent families, compared with almost 13 percent of black two-parent families, had incomes below the official poverty level.[20] Black men, particularly young black men, are less likely than white men to be steadily employed and earn enough to keep a family above the poverty line.[21] This not only helps explain the racial difference in poverty in two-parent families but also contributes to the greater likelihood of black than white children living in poor mother-only families.

Income of Children's Families

Children's economic well-being is reflected not just in poverty trends but by the average level and distribution of income among families with children. Clearly, the trend toward more children living with a mother only has had adverse economic consequences for children. But other changes have increased the money income available to children. First, the average number of children per family has declined (see Table 5). Both mother-only and two-parent families now have fewer children, on average, than two decades ago. Even though family income has not increased much in real terms since the mid-1970s,

it supports fewer children today than in 1970 or in 1980.

Second, the educational level of their parents has increased dramatically. In 1960, 62 percent of children lived with a parent who was at least a high school graduate and 15 percent had a parent who had completed college. These percentages increased to 74 and 20 percent, respectively, by 1980. By 1988, 80 percent of children had a parent who had completed at least four years of high school and 23 percent lived with a parent who had completed at least four years of college.

In 1988, children in single-parent families remained less likely to be living with a parent who was a high school or college graduate than children living with two parents; but the average educational level of parents in both single- and two-parent families improved. Among children living in households maintained by their mother, only 45 percent had a mother who had graduated from high school in 1970, but this figure increased to 67 percent by 1988.

Rising parental educational attainment is a positive trend for children. More educated parents, on average, are better able to provide an adequate family income. They are also typically better equipped to assist children with homework and enhance the learning environment at home.[22]

The final factor, shown in Table 5, which has improved the income situation of children, is the increased likelihood that a child's mother will work outside the home. But, as mothers spend more hours at a job, they spend fewer hours taking care of their children. Although there is concern about whether care children receive while their mothers work is a satisfactory alternative to mother-care, there is little question that the dramatic increase in employed mothers has enhanced the *money income* available to children, at least in two-parent families.

In 1970, two in five children under age 18 had a mother in the labor force; by 1988, three in five did. The increase in mothers' labor force participation occurred for preschool as well as school-age children. In 1970, only 29 percent of children under age six had a mother in the labor force, but by 1988, the majority (53 percent) had a mother who worked outside the home. Among children 6 to 17

Table 5. Selected Characteristics of Children's Families, 1970, 1980, and 1988

	Total			Two-parent			Mother-only		
	1970	1980	1988	1970	1980	1988	1970	1980	1988
Average number of children per family*	2.33	1.89	1.81	2.33	1.91	1.84	2.36	1.87	1.74
Educational attainment of parent* (percent)									
High school graduate	61.9	73.6	80.1	64.1	76.8	83.3	44.5	59.8	67.2
College graduate	14.9	19.7	22.6	16.3	22.6	26.3	3.2	6.3	8.2
Percent of children with mother in labor force									
Children under age 18	39.2	53.7	61.7	37.6	51.7	61.7	53.2	62.5	61.6
Under age 6	28.6	43.4	52.7	27.6	42.2	53.7	40.4	50.3	47.4
Ages 6–17	43.8	58.1	66.4	41.8	56.1	66.2	57.2	66.6	67.2

*Includes families in which the householder has biological, adoptive, and/or stepchildren.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20: No. 218, Tables 1 and 14; No. 366, Tables 1 and 8; No. 437, Tables 1 and 8; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Handbook Bulletin 2217, Table 55, and unpublished tabulations.

Box 2. Measuring Poverty

A family's income is classified as being above or below the poverty level on the basis of the poverty index constructed by the Social Security Administration in 1964. The poverty index, which only counts money income, relates a family's income to its minimum consumption needs, or poverty threshold, as calculated by the government.

Families of three or more persons spend an average of about one-third of their income on food, according to a Department of Agriculture Survey of Food Consumption in 1955. Thus the poverty threshold was set at three times the cost of an Economy Food Plan developed by the Department of Agriculture in 1961. For smaller families and individuals, the poverty threshold is set at slightly more than three times the cost of the food plan because smaller households have larger fixed expenses per person.

The poverty income thresholds are updated each year to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index, or inflation. In 1988, the threshold was $10,997 for an average family of four, and it ranged from $5,478 for a single person to $21,947 for a family of nine or more persons.

years old, the percentage rose from 44 to 66 percent.

The increase in mothers' employment was greatest for children in two-parent families. Although only a minority (36 percent) of married mothers with children under age six worked full time by 1988, the rapid increase in labor force participation of mothers in two-parent families has helped to counterbalance the lack of wage growth of husbands.

Also, the gap in labor force participation between married and single mothers has narrowed. In 1970, 53 percent of single mothers worked outside the home, compared to only 38 percent of married mothers. During the 1980s, the labor force participation rates for married mothers increased, while they remained level for single mothers. By 1988, married mothers with children under 18 were just as likely to be employed as single mothers, and married women with children under age six were more likely to work.

This stagnation in the labor force participation of single mothers reflects the changing composition of this group: a growing proportion of single mothers of young children are themselves young, have never married, and have poor employment prospects. Because single mothers are less likely to be working, they and their children are more likely to be poor.

Average family income in families with children fell, in real terms, during the first half of the 1980s but rebounded in the latter part of the decade. By 1987, median family income for children under age 18 and living in families, stood at $29,892, down slightly from the 1979 level of $30,005 (adjusted to 1987 dollars). Because the average number of children per family declined somewhat during the 1980s, however, the average income available to each child probably did not fall, and may even have increased slightly, during the decade.

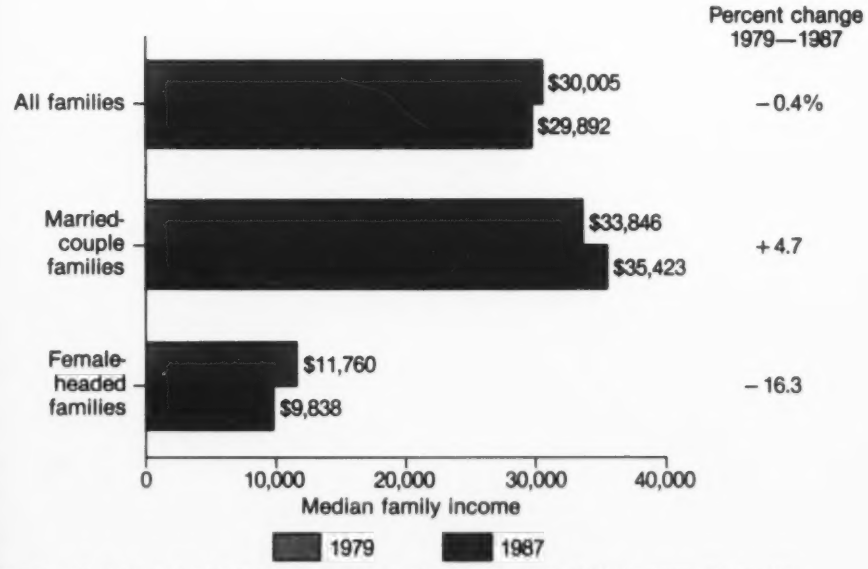
While real income for children in two-parent families increased by 5 percent between 1979 and 1987, income for children in mother-only families decreased by 16 percent (see Figure 6), and the income gap between these two types of families widened. In 1979, the median income in mother-only families was 34 percent of that in two-parent families. In 1987, mother-only families received an average annual income of $9,838, only 28 percent of the $35,423 average for children in two-parent families.

To summarize what has been happening to the economic situation of children, it is useful to look at the three demographic dimensions: age, family structure, and race. Between 1960 and 1979, per capita income was growing just as fast for children as for adults. Among blacks, per capita income growth for children may even have exceeded that for adults. But during the first half of the 1980s, the economic situation of children relative to adults deteriorated. This was partly due to the fact that more children lived in mother-only families, but income for children in many two-parent families fell as well.[23]

The income for adults in childless households has grown more rapidly, in real terms, than it has for parents supporting children. The elderly have fared well because Social Security, pensions, and other non-labor income have experienced a real growth. Children, on the other hand, usually must rely on the earned income of their parents. Much of the positive income effect of demographic adjustments, such as the decline in average family size, occurred prior to 1979. Since then two negative factors for children—the lack of wage growth for their fathers and the continued trend toward living with only one provider, their mother—have exerted a greater impact on the economic well-being of children.

During the 1980s, increased labor force participation of mothers partially offset the slow growth in wages. On average, the income of two-parent families with children rose, or at least did not decline. But, the number of children from two-parent families in poverty

Figure 6. Median Annual Family Income of Families with Children under Age 18, 1979 and 1987



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, Numbers 132 and 162.

increased, suggesting that the additional income mothers brought home improved the living standard for children in middle- and upper-income families but was not enough to keep many lower-income families out of poverty. Consequently, the income disparity between children in more and less affluent families may have worsened during the decade.

The higher poverty rates and the declining average income for children in mother-only families relative to children in two-parent families also points to a growing inequality in the economic circumstances among children. A child who spends all of childhood with two parents may be increasingly better-off than a child who spends either all or part of his childhood in a single-parent family.

Because most children live in two-parent families and the income in these families improved, on average, during the 1980s, the income situation of children did not deteriorate in absolute terms and may have even improved slightly in per capita terms between 1979 and 1988.

But the percentage of children living in two-parent families is dropping; more live with a single parent or other relative, who tend to be less well-off. The majority of black children, and one in four Hispanic children, are currently in families subject to a great deal of economic insecurity, and this must be viewed as a very negative trend. Families, and the economic security they provide to children, are still the major means of transferring opportunity from one generation to the next.

Parental Time with Children

Income is only one dimension of children's well-being. Another is the time, attention, and care that parents and other adults provide. Single-parent families are not only disadvantaged economically relative to two-parent families, they are also "time-poor."[24] In a single-parent household, there is only one person to balance work and child care responsibilities. In two-parent families, parents have more flexibility in juggling home and job activities.

Money income and poverty trends may actually give an overly optimistic picture of change in well-being for children in two-parent families.[25] Hours spent by parents, most often mothers, in child care or housework are not accorded any monetary value in estimates of family income. And the trends in family income do not reflect the increased number of hours of market work required to produce a family's earned income. Because both mothers and fathers work more hours to provide adequately for a family now than two decades ago, they have fewer hours available for the care and nurturing of their children.

Given the increase in children living with only one parent and the rapid increase in labor market participation of married mothers, has the well-being of children changed in ways that money income trends do not capture? Has the quality as well as the quantity of the time parents spend with their children changed? What are the effects of these changes on children?

Mothers spend more time with children than fathers, in part because mothers are less often employed outside the home. Even when employed, they are less likely than fathers to be employed full time. As children grow older, and spend more of their day in school, with friends, or in other activities, the difference between mothers and fathers, and between employed and stay-at-home mothers, in the time spent with their children, becomes less important.

In two-parent families with preschoolers, employed mothers spend less time than full-time homemakers in play and educational activities with their children on weekdays (14 minutes less, on average), less time "having fun" (about an

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Older children spend more hours in school-related activities, leaving less time for parents.

hour less), less time providing physical care (almost 40 minutes less), less time at meals with their children (12 minutes less), and, of course, much less time doing housework while their children are present (two hours less).[26] Interestingly, fathers in dual-earner families with preschool children spend less time during the week "having fun" and "sharing meals" with children than do fathers who are the sole wage earner in the family—probably because they must shoulder more of the household chores. However, fathers in dual-earner families compensate for this by spending considerably more time on the weekend with preschool-age children than do fathers who are the sole bread-winners.

Older children spend much of their day in school, with friends, and in other activities, leaving fewer hours to spend with parents. But here again, mothers who are full-time homemakers spend more time "having fun" with their school-age children, sharing meals, and much more time doing housework in the presence of children than employed mothers. Fathers' time with school-age children is about the same whether or not the mother works outside the home.

Less is known about the time single mothers spend with their children. However, data from a national survey of families and households suggests that, when hours of employment are controlled, single mothers spend as much time as other mothers in child-related activities, such as playing or working with the child, helping with homework, or having private talks. But, primarily because of the absence of a second parent, children in single-parent families spend considerably less time in one-on-one activities with a parent than children in intact families or stepfamilies. Children in stepfamilies receive somewhat less parental time than children in intact families, and children with a single mother receive a little more parental time than children with a single father, but the differences are relatively small.[27]

Do children actually spend less total time "having fun," in "educational and play activities," or "receiving care" depending upon whether they live with a single parent, have two working parents, or a stay-at-home mother and working father? Obviously, the person providing care differs among these children, but does the quantity and quality of care differ from the perspective of the child? The quality of care and the amount of time a child spends with caregivers other than parents is perhaps as important as the amount of time and quality of interaction that a child has with parents.

Mothers in the Labor Force

A great deal of attention has been paid to how maternal employment affects children, but few definitive truths have been discovered.[28] A mother's employment can have positive or negative effects on children, depending upon the family's socioeconomic status, the age

of the child, and whether a mother works full or part time.

Psychologist Jay Belsky and associates stirred up controversy when they asserted that maternal employment during the first year of life interferes with a secure mother-child attachment, negatively affecting children's later development. Other research suggests that mothers' employment can negatively influence children's cognitive development, but only when employed full time, rather than part time, during the preschool years.[29]

Effects also seem to differ by family socioeconomic status, and by the sex of the child. A number of studies find small, negative effects on achievement of boys, in particular sons in middle or high socioeconomic status families. Positive effects of maternal employment on children are more often noted for girls and for children in lower socioeconomic status families—perhaps because the additional income provided by the mother's employment is so beneficial to the family that it compensates for the mother's absence. For children with less educated, lower-income parents, a child-care center or babysitter may actually provide higher "quality" care than would their own mothers. In contrast, more affluent mothers tend to have higher verbal skills and more education than most professional child-care providers, and hence, are at least as effective in stimulating children's cognitive ability.[30]

Daughters of employed mothers are more independent and more likely to plan future employment themselves, and both sons and daughters of employed mothers hold more egalitarian sex-role attitudes and view women as more competent than children of nonemployed mothers.[31]

Mothers' employment may influence children's well-being directly through time spent with children and indirectly through a variety of mechanisms. For example, maternal employment increases family income—particularly important for low-income, two-parent families and mother-only families. Also, female labor force participation is related to fertility. While it is not clear whether employment *causes* low fertility or vice versa, employed mothers have fewer children than nonemployed mothers. Children with fewer siblings, at least fewer closely-spaced siblings, tend to have higher academic achievement than those with more siblings.[32] To the extent that employment leads to a smaller family size, maternal employment can indirectly benefit children's economic well-being and cognitive development. Of course, if employment increases the likelihood of marital disruption by enabling women to provide for themselves, maternal employment may negatively affect children's economic well-being. As stated above, families headed by divorced and separated women have lower incomes and are more likely to fall below the poverty level.

Father Absence

For most children, the divorce of their parents means that their father leaves the household, limiting their contact with him, as well as his influence over their lives. Limited contact with fathers is even more characteristic of children whose parents have never married.[33] Not all fathers absent themselves from the daily lives of their children following divorce or separation. As noted earlier, the proportion of children living with their father has increased, although it is still only 3 percent of all children. About 11 percent of children in single-parent families lived with their father rather than their mother in 1988 (see Table 1, page 10).

What does father absence mean for children? For many, it entails absence of financial support. Recent information from a national survey of households and families indicates that just under one-half of noncustodial fathers of children under age 19 pay child support. Among mothers who received support, the average amount paid during the pre-

ceding year was only $2,600.[34] According to other estimates, only about three-fifths of mothers with children under age 21 were awarded child support by a court. Among those who were supposed to receive child support in 1985, about one-quarter of fathers paid nothing, one-quarter paid part, and around one-half paid the full amount of funds due. These percentages have not changed much since the late 1970s when this information was first collected.[35]

Fathers, even absent fathers, can help nurture their children through visits, letters, and phone calls. They can remain involved in the lives of their children after they no longer reside with them, but most data show that children's contact with a noncustodial father is relatively infrequent. For example, recently collected data indicate that 29 percent of absent fathers had not visited their children at all during the past year and an additional 12 percent had only seen their children once during the year. About one-quarter saw their children at least weekly. Thirty-seven percent of the fathers had no phone or mail contact with children over a one-year period.[36]

Infrequent contact between fathers and their children also reduces the likelihood that the mothers will receive child support. At least one recent study suggests that this may be the primary way in which father absence hurts children. Sociologist Frank Furstenberg and colleagues found that the amount of paternal contact and a child's reported "closeness" to his or her noncustodial father were unrelated to a variety of measures of social/psychological well-being, measures based on the mother's, teacher's, and child's reports of problem behavior, academic difficulty, delinquency, and distress. However, the lack of parental contact did decrease the likelihood of children receiving any financial support from their father.[37]

Children do experience negative social/psychological effects when they are deprived of contact with their father. The accumulated evidence supports the common assumption that children reared by two biological parents will exhibit higher levels of well-being than children reared in one-parent households.[38]

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After their parents divorce, children's contact with fathers is often infrequent.

In general, the children of divorced or separated parents experience more emotional and behavioral problems, such as increased levels of aggression, heightened anxiety, more dependency, and a tendency to withdraw or be easily distracted.[39] Each of these factors affects how well children get along with peers and teacher's perceptions of them. Research suggests that while actual cognitive differences between children in one-parent and two-parent families from similar socioeconomic levels are quite small, teacher evaluations, such as grades, are lower for children in single-parent families.[40]

Not all the effects of parental separation are unequivocally negative. Children reared in single-parent families are less rigid in defining appropriate male and female roles. Adolescents in single-parent families, who may be forced to assume more responsibility at an earlier age, tend to be more mature, have higher feelings of efficacy, and a stronger internal locus of control than their peers in two-parent families.[41] Of course, they also appear less likely to rely on parental input in their decisions

and may be more susceptible to the influence of their peers.[42]

The most severe social/psychological consequences may be heightened around the time of the marital breakup, but then diminish as children adjust to their new family situation. For example, young children appear to have personal adjustment problems or be less sociable at the time of the divorce, but this often disappears with time.[43]

Parental conflict prior to a divorce may be as damaging to a child's self-concept as the divorce itself. Also, among children from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, behavior problems are as frequent for children in intact families with persistent parental conflict as among children who have experienced their parent's marital disruption.[44]

The absence of the father after a marital separation or divorce may be more negative for boys than for girls: personal adjustment problems around the time of divorce are more severe and last longer for boys.[45] Father absence may also lead to lower achievement for boys; boys have more difficulty getting along with peers and functioning in school following divorce than do girls.[46] Other findings suggest that girls' negative reactions to divorce may be delayed until adolescence when they experience more depression than their counterparts in intact families.[47] Girls also may handle their mother's remarriage less well than boys. While many of these gender differences are small, they do suggest that the absence of a same-sex role model makes living in a mother-only family problematic for boys and that absence of a father is a negative factor for adolescent girls coming to terms with their own sexual identity and exploring relationships with the opposite sex.

A growing body of research also points to several longer term consequences of growing up in mother-only families, effects that can not be explained by socioeconomic differences. There is a greater incidence of deviant behaviors (e.g., skipping school, larceny, behavior problems, alcohol and drug use) among adolescents in single- than in two-parent families.[48] Some attribute this, in part, to less parental supervision and control over children in one-parent households.[49]

Children who grow up in mother-only families complete fewer years of school and are more likely to drop out of high school than children in intact families.[50] Children in these families report less parental involvement in helping with homework and planning their high school curriculum than do sons and daughters in two-parent families.[51]

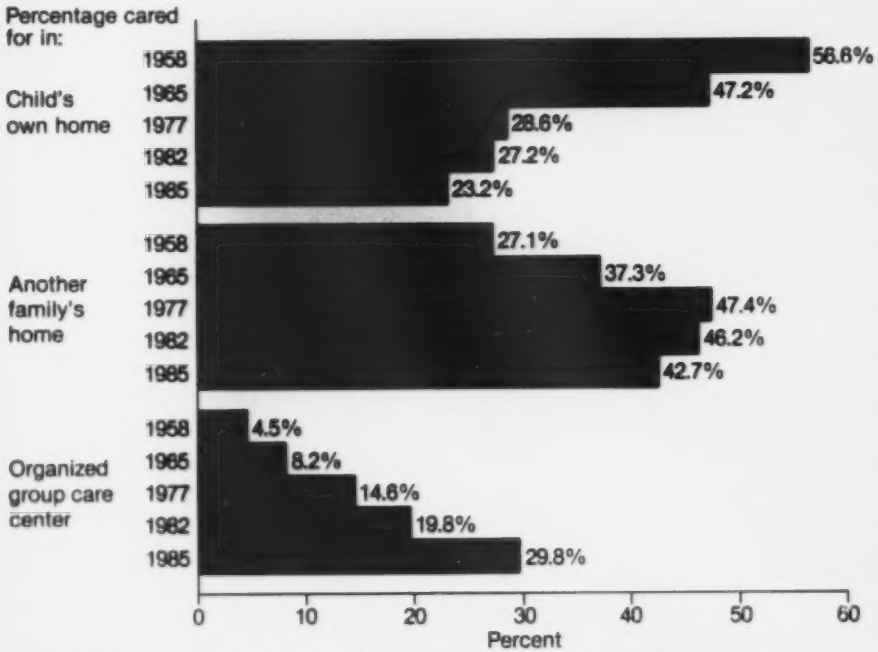
Children from mother-only families subsequently experience more poverty and earn less as young adults. Daughters of single mothers more often receive welfare than daughters from two-parent families.[52] In part, this occurs because they become sexually active at an earlier age, are more likely to marry early, have children early, subsequently divorce, and become single mothers themselves.[53]

Child Care

Given the trends in maternal employment and divorce, care other than mother-care is a fact of life for an increasing proportion of children. How are families, both two-parent and single-parent families, juggling work and child care? And what are the effects, if any, of child care on children?

In June 1958, the U.S. Census Bureau first included a question on the child-care arrangements for the youngest child among mothers with a child under age six who were employed full time. Then, only 18 percent of married mothers with a child under six were in the labor force. The majority (57 percent) of mothers with full-time jobs arranged for their young children to be cared for in their own home, with about three-quarters cared for either by their father or another relative (see Figure 7). A sizable

Figure 7. Child-Care Setting of Youngest Child of Mothers Employed Full Time, 1958–1985



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-70, No. 9; and Series P-23, No. 117.

minority (27 percent) arranged for care in someone else's home, usually a relative's. Very few children (less than 5 percent) went to organized group care centers.

Between the late 1950s and the late 1980s, the proportion of mothers of children under age six who were in the labor force increased from one-fifth to one-half.[54] As the proportion of young children requiring care while their mother worked increased, the location of care changed dramatically. By the winter of 1984–85, less than one-quarter of children under age five whose mothers were employed full time were cared for in their own home and 30 percent were in child-care centers or nursery or preschool programs during all or most of the time their mother was at work. The most common child-care setting in 1984–85 was another person's home, used by 43 percent of mothers employed full time for their youngest child under age five.

For mothers employed part time, the trends in child-care arrangements have been similar except that in-home care is the most common child-care setting, used by 39 percent of mothers for their youngest child under age five.[55]

Although care of young children has increasingly moved out of the child's own home, often into group situations, family members continue to have a major role in the provision of care, especially care needed "around the edges." Whereas the majority (61 percent) of young children whose mothers are employed full time are cared for by nonrelatives—in the child's home, a family day-care home, or in centers and nursery/preschool settings—the primary child-care providers for the other 39 percent are other family members or relatives (see Table 6, page 28).

For preschool-age children whose mothers work part time and for school-age children, the incidence of care by parents or close relatives is even greater. For example, in families where the mother works part time, almost one-quarter of the children under age five are cared for by their father while their mother works. An additional 16 percent are cared for by a grandparent, usually a grandmother. Some 13 percent of mothers employed part time report that they are able to care for their children while they work. Some women combine paid employment with rearing their own children by caring for other families' children along with their own.

About three-quarters of children in the age range of 5 to 14 are in school during most of the hours that their mother is at work, and hence, for these children, school serves as a primary child-care arrangement.[56] For an important subgroup of these children, before or after school care also is needed to cover all the hours their parents are at work. For about one-quarter of the school-age children, the school day does not coincide with their mothers' work schedule. Parents or other relatives provide child care in 65 percent of these situations; 27 percent of the children are with their father, 12 percent with a grandparent, 13 percent with another relative, and 13 percent are reported to be with their mother while she works.

Parents often must balance each spouse's work schedules, school hours, and availability of relatives for secondary care in order to provide constant care for their children. University of Maryland demographer Harriet Presser has shown that almost 20 percent of male and female workers who have children under age 14 work a fixed non-day shift or a rotating shift. The likelihood of working other than a fixed day shift is even higher among parents of preschool-age children (30 percent of mothers and fathers who are employed full time, 40 percent of mothers employed part time).[57] Although parents often cannot choose their shift, and many things other than child-care needs influence parents' work schedules, fathers become more involved in child care (intentionally or not) the less their work schedule overlaps with their wife's work hours. And, particularly for mothers who are employed part time, it may only "pay" to work if their schedule can be arranged so that children can be cared for by their father or another relative.

Quality of Child Care

How can parents be assured that their child is getting high quality—or at least adequate—child care? Early childhood educators and developmental psychologists have discovered several factors that can enhance the child-care environment of young children of working parents. Much of their research has focused on child-care centers, often university-based centers, and on variables that can be regulated, such as group size, adult/child ratios, physical space, and curriculum. Results suggest, among other things, that small groups (fewer than 15 children) and small center size, in addition to relatively high adult-to-child ratios, foster higher quality.[58]

Research comparing child-care settings (centers versus in-home babysitters versus family day-care homes) suggests that on cognitive measures, independence of their mother, and social reciprocity and interaction with their

mother, children in child-care centers score higher than children at home with sitters on all dimensions and higher than children in family day-care homes on cognitive measures and independence, though not necessarily on sociability.[59] Evaluation of programs like Head Start also indicates that high quality child care enhances children's intellectual development, particularly among children in socioeconomic groups at risk of low cognitive achievement.[60] Children in child care compare very favorably with children reared at home on measures of peer interaction, but have more difficulty conforming to adult standards of behavior and maturity.[61]

One recent review of research concluded that "to date, the best predictor of positive outcomes for day-care children is a caregiver who is involved, positive, and stable."[62] The same can be said for children cared for by their mothers, fathers, and other relatives. The presumption is that children with parents and relatives *are* with a stable, nurturing caregiver. Working parents want to ensure a similar environment for their children during the hours they are not with them, but the cost becomes a major factor. In general, high-income families have much greater child-care options available, including mother-care, than low-income families. Much of the recent political debate about child care focuses on the discrepancy in quality care available to low-income (especially single-parent) families and more affluent families. Unstimulating, or worse, negligent care, handicaps these children before they even enter school, and often they can never catch up.

Much remains to be done to assure a good early childhood environment for children from poorer families, but deciding what steps to take and who will pay for them is a volatile political issue. A recent National Academy of Sciences report calls for the federal government to spend an additional $5 to $10 billion per year to expand the Head Start program, increase child-care subsidies to low-income families, and to become involved in the regulation of child-care providers. But, child care and early childhood education must compete with other social issues for shrinking federal dollars.

"Latchkey" Children

Many school-age children care for themselves before or after school while their parents are at work, the so-called "latchkey kids." Table 6 on page 28 shows that 20 percent of school-age children requiring a secondary arrangement in addition to school are caring for themselves. Among those whose mothers' work hours do not overlap much with

Michael Siluk

"Latchkey" children tend to be from white, middle-class, suburban families.

Table 6. Care-Providers for Children with Employed Mothers, 1984–1985

	Children under age 5		Children ages 5–14	
	Mother employed full time	Mother employed part time	Primary arrangement (covering most hours mother is at work)	Secondary arrangement (before and after school)
Percent cared for by:				
Relatives	39.1	62.5	64.9	55.7
Father	10.7	23.8	26.8	16.1
Grandparent	15.6	16.4	12.1	13.2
Other relative	7.8	9.0	13.2	20.6
Mother while working	5.0	13.3	12.8	5.8
Non-relatives	60.9	37.6	24.4	24.3
Individuals	32.5	21.1	12.9	16.7
Group care/school	28.4	16.5	11.4	7.6
Child cares for self	—	—	10.7	20.0
Number of children (thousands)	5,060	3,108	4,534	5,037

Note: Data reflect care arrangement for youngest child under age 15.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Winter 1984–85," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-70, No. 9, Tables 1, B, and F.

school hours, 10 percent are reported to be in self-care.

While some have estimated that there are as many as 15 million "latchkey" children in the United States, the most accurate guess is probably from a 1984 Census Bureau Survey on before- and after-school care of children 5 to 13 years old, which found that about 2.1 million children cared for themselves after school. An additional 0.3 million cared for themselves or were in the care of a sibling under age 14 at other times, such as before school or at night.

Dispelling the stereotype of a latchkey child spending many long, lonely hours at home, most of these children were alone for less than one hour before school and less than two hours after school. Parents who worked away from home for longer hours tended to arrange adult supervision for their children.[63]

The incidence of self-care was relatively low for younger children but increased with the age of the child. The highest incidence was for children 11 to 13 years old of mothers employed full time; about one-quarter of these children spent some time alone or with no one over age 14 present in the household.

Race, family income, household composition, and residential neighborhood were also related to the incidence of self-care. White, middle-class children who lived in suburban neighborhoods with no older siblings, grandparents, or other adult relatives other than parents at home were more likely than children in other socioeconomic groups to spend some hours at home without adult supervision.

Self-care apparently is used by parents who feel relatively sure that their children are old enough to handle being alone, feel secure that their children will be safe at home alone, and can assure that their children will only be on their own for relatively short periods of time. What is not known and is perhaps more important, is how children spend time alone after or before school, how actively parents try to structure hours of self-care (for example, by requiring

household chores or homework to be completed during the time alone), and how well parents are able to monitor (by telephone or asking neighbors to check on their children) the time school-age children spend on their own.

Despite the somewhat optimistic portrait of self-care that emerges from the above survey data, teachers perceive this lack of supervision after school to be a major reason children have difficulty. In a 1987 "Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher," 51 percent reported that the "latchkey" phenomenon was a "major cause" of students' difficulties in school.

Francis Wardle

About 60 percent of children whose mothers work full time are cared for by non-relatives.

Family Role in Child Care

Despite the fact that the majority of mothers of children of any age are employed and must arrange alternate care for their children, when mothers are asked about the ideal care of young children, care by the mother remains the choice of the overwhelming majority of working mothers as well as full-time homemakers. If mother-care is not available, then the majority say father-care is the best substitute. Other relatives, grandmothers in particular, are next in order of preference, at least for children under the age of three.[64]

The preference for parental or familial care of children appears to be out of step with a changed social reality. Today's mothers are more often employed outside the home and fathers more frequently do not live with their children. Yet a closer look at the data in Table 6 reveals that the primary care-provider for a majority of preschool and school-age children is their mother, father, or another relative, upholding the ideal of strong family involvement in the care of children.

Although the majority of mothers of children under age six were working in 1988, at any point during the year, 47 percent of children had mothers who did not work outside the home. Presumably, most of these children were cared for by their mothers. As many as 25 percent of all children under six were cared for by their mother while she worked, or by their father or other relatives while their mother was at work. Combining the 47 percent of children in mother-care with the approximately 25 percent primarily in the care of family members or relatives while the mother was at work, we discover that a majority of preschool-age children (perhaps as many as 70 to 75 percent) were still primarily cared for by their mother, father, or other relatives in 1988.

Similarly, at any given point during 1988, the mothers of one-third of school-age children were not in the labor force, and presumably were free to care for school-age children before and after school. Other estimates show that almost one-third of school-age children were not in any before- or after-school child-care setting, presumably because their parents, usually their mothers, managed their work schedules to coincide with the school day. Hence, around 35 percent of school-age children under age 15 spent time in child care in addition to the time they spent in school. But given the high incidence of parental or relative care for these children, perhaps as many as 20 percent of school-age children were cared for by their mother

while she worked, their father, or other relatives. Only around 15 percent of children were in the care of non-relatives, in before- and after-school programs, or cared for themselves.

Once children enter school, they require fewer hours of additional child care, at least during the school year, and are often cared for by their own mother, father, or relatives. Ironically, school-age children are more likely to be cared for by their parents than are preschoolers, yet parental care is considered more crucial for the cognitive and emotional development of younger children. Also, parents express a stronger desire for younger children to be cared for by their mothers. Estimates of the children in child care at any given point underestimate the total proportion who spend part of their childhood cared for by a non-relative (for example, in preschool, or during school vacations), but they do suggest that care of children in the U.S. remains very much a "family affair."

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

Many parents spend considerable time and energy helping their children with school work.

Educational Performance

After age five or six children spend much of their day in school. The school environment and how it affects children, educationally, socially, and emotionally, are critical aspects of their well-being. Concern about the quality of education children are receiving in the public schools continues to command the attention of local school boards and state legislatures. Many parents also spend considerable time and energy monitoring their children's progress in school, helping with homework, and interacting with teachers and other school officials. Most parents want their children to do well in school, finish high school, perhaps go on to college, and move successfully into the adult world of work.

Preschool Enrollment

The increase in nursery or preschool attendance is the major change in U.S. school enrollment during the past two decades. In the case of three- and four-year olds, the percentage enrolled in nursery schools, pre-kindergarten or kindergarten programs, or child-care centers with an "educational" curriculum increased from 11 percent in 1965 to 38 percent in 1988.[65]

This change has been motivated, in part, by the increased demand for child care as more mothers of young children have joined the labor force. However, enrollment in nursery and preschool programs has been nearly as high for children of nonemployed mothers as for mothers employed outside the home.[66] In October 1988, 42 percent of the three- and four-year old children of employed mothers attended nursery school or kindergarten, as did more than one-third of the children whose mother did not work outside the home (see Table 7).

Nursery school attendance is more common in the Northeast than other U.S. regions, and among children who live outside the central cities of metropolitan areas. The higher incidence of preprimary enrollment among suburban children, in part, reflects the fact that families living in these areas tend to be

more affluent than families living in central cities or nonmetropolitan areas. The cost of preschool may be prohibitive for low-income parents. Except for programs such as Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs offered in some public schools, nursery school programs can be relatively expensive.

Well-educated mothers, who probably are more affluent, are more likely than less-educated mothers to enroll their children in a preschool program. Sixty percent of young children whose mother was a college graduate (or had an advanced degree) attended nursery school in the fall of 1988, while only 22 percent of those whose mother had not completed high school were enrolled.

Thirty years ago, children's first experience with a school setting came at around age five when they entered kindergarten. Today, a significant minority of American three- and four-year olds, the majority in affluent families with well-educated parents, have learned many of the behavioral expectations of teachers and classrooms prior to entry into kindergarten. Kindergarten curriculums have become somewhat more "academic," partially in response to this trend in pre-kindergarten enrollment. Because children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often enter kindergarten with no prior school experience, they start their school career at a great disadvantage. The recognition that this disparity in preschool attendance will only widen the performance gap between lower- and higher-income groups has increased the pressure on many public school systems to provide pre-kindergarten programs for all chil-

Table 7. Preschool Enrollment of Three- and Four-Year Olds by Selected Characteristics, 1988

	Total children (thousands)	Percent enrolled		
		Total	Nursery school	Kindergarten
Total	7,318	38.2	32.5	5.7
Residence				
Central cities	2,307	34.0	28.3	5.7
Suburbs	3,405	43.1	36.9	6.2
Nonmetropolitan	1,606	33.8	29.1	4.7
Family income				
Less than $15,000	2,296	27.7	21.2	4.8
$15,000 to $29,000	1,930	30.4	25.5	6.5
$30,000 to $49,000	1,772	47.4	41.5	4.9
$50,000 and over	1,064	56.2	56.2	5.9
Children living with mother				
Total	6,939	38.4	32.8	5.6
Mother in labor force	3,936	41.1	34.9	6.3
Employed full time	2,395	41.3	33.5	7.7
Employed part time	1,268	43.0	39.2	3.8
Unemployed	272	31.6	26.5	5.1
Mother not in labor force	3,003	34.8	30.1	4.7
Mother's education				
Less than high school	1,334	21.7	16.2	5.5
High school graduate	2,909	33.8	28.6	5.2
Some college	1,394	43.8	38.8	5.0
College graduate	1,301	60.0	52.9	7.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1988," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, forthcoming, Table 4.

dren. In New York City, for example, preschool programs for four-year olds are being introduced into many public elementary schools.

School Enrollment

School attendance is compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 15, and enrollment in school has been virtually universal for this age group since at least 1960. For five- and six-year olds, school attendance increased from about 80 percent in 1960 to 95 percent in the mid-1970s, reflecting the general move toward school attendance at earlier ages and almost universal kindergarten attendance.[67]

One important change in school enrollment has been an increase in the percentage of 16- and 17-year olds who remain enrolled in school. In 1960, 85 percent of white and 76 percent of black youths of this age were enrolled in school. In the latter 1980s, these percentages stood at about 93 percent. For blacks, most of this increase took place between 1960 and 1975 with only small increases in the last decade and a half. For whites, the percentage enrolled at this age increased in the 1960s, was stable or dipped slightly in the 1970s, and may have increased slightly in the 1980s.[68]

The rate of high school graduation has remained stable for whites since the mid-1970s. About three-quarters of white youth complete high school by age 18 or 19, and many others finish at slightly older ages. In 1986, about 85 percent of 20- to 24-year-old whites were high school graduates. For blacks, the rate of high school completion has risen in recent years. By 1986, about 65 percent of 18- and 19-year olds, and 81 percent of 20- to 24-year olds were high school graduates. More black than white youth were still in high school at age 18 or 19, but the high school completion rate of 20- to 24-year olds was very similar for the two racial groups. Black students are more likely today than in the past to remain in school until they graduate. Among Hispanics, however, only about 55 percent of 18- and 19-year olds and 62 percent of 20- to 24-year olds had completed high school in 1986. The trend for Hispanics has been uneven, especially compared to the improvement among blacks.[69] The continued immigration of Hispanics, many of whom are not fluent in English when they arrive, has been a contributing factor to the lack of educational progress among Hispanic students.

Academic Performance

The academic competence of students as they leave high school is at least as important as the proportion of high school students who graduate. Considerable attention has been given during the past two decades to declining levels of achievement, at least among the brightest school children, and the comparative disadvantage of U.S. school children with children in other advanced industrial nations in math and science achievement.

The most often cited measures of school achievement among elementary and secondary school-age children come from the congressionally mandated National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which has tested student's reading, mathematics, and science achievement at selected intervals in the 1970s and 1980s. In recent years, the NAEP has assessed more than just basic skills, adding sections on children's computer literacy and high school students' knowledge of history, geography, and literature. And, for the first time in 1988, an International Assessment of Educational Progress was conducted in which the mathematics and science proficiency of U.S. 13-year olds was compared with that of children from Canada, Ireland, Korea, the United Kingdom, and Spain.[70]

Results from the NAEP suggest that, although basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills may have increased slightly, or at least remained level, students have not improved their ability to garner more than a superficial understanding of what they read or to handle analytic problem-solving in mathematics. Many students, particularly minority students, have great difficulty with reading and mathematics tasks that require complex reasoning.[71] In addition, U.S. school children scored lower than children from any of the other countries tested in the area of mathematics proficiency in 1988.

Average science scores increased slightly in the 1980s, after declining in the 1970s, particularly among 17-year olds. The performance of U.S. students appears inadequate, however, when we consider the low percentage who score extremely well on science proficiency tests, or when we compare U.S. school children with those in other countries. U.S. and Irish school children were in the lowest scoring group of science proficiency scores. The science (as well as mathematics) scores of Korean students were superior to those of school children in each of the other countries included in the international assessment, and far superior to those of children in the United States.

The most often cited statistic on the deterioration of the academic achievement of U.S. students was the decline in average scores on college entrance examinations, particularly the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), that occurred between 1963 and 1980. Research indicates that a sizable portion of the decline in the 1960s resulted from a change in the composition of those taking the test, as college attendance rose among students of lower ability. However, this does not explain the continued decline during the 1970s. Some of the decline may have resulted from changes in high school curricula that allowed students to take more electives and a general movement away from traditional academic coursework.[72] Partially in response to this, there has been a "back to basics" movement in the schools during the 1980s with an increase in required courses for high school graduation in many states.[73]

The downward trend in SAT scores seems to have ended, with a small improvement in average verbal scores between 1981 and 1985 and in math scores between 1981 and 1987. However, in 1988, the average verbal SAT score stood at 428, down 50 points from the 478 level of 1963. Similarly, the average mathematics score was 476, 26 points lower than in 1963.[74]

The decline in SAT scores reflects trends among relatively gifted students—those who have some hope of acceptance to college—although the selectivity of this group varies geographically and has shifted over time.[75] But while average scores may be improving, the percentage of students with extremely high scores (over 700) has declined over time, just as a smaller percentage of younger students are able to achieve high levels of competency on the NAEP. These trends raise questions about how well America's "best and brightest" are doing, and concern that while there has been improvement at the lower end of the achievement scale, there has been little or no improvement at the top.

On the positive side, however, achievement scores of minorities have improved, although a wide gap remains between minority and nonminority students. Average levels of reading, math, and science competency of elementary and high school students have not dropped during the past two decades. The decline in SAT scores appears to have ended. And the likelihood of high school graduation has improved, at least for black students.

There are also trends in the schools themselves that bode well for the future. Per-pupil expenditures continue to increase and student/teacher ratios continue to decline, although these changes were underway throughout the period of

declining SAT scores. The annual salaries of teachers, after stagnating and then declining during the 1970s, rose in real terms during the 1980s. In 1988, teacher salaries (in real dollars) were at the highest level they had been in 30 years.[76] The demand for teachers, in particular secondary school teachers, will also increase in the future. Increased demand combined with better salaries could encourage more talented individuals to enter the profession. However, teaching will have to compete with other, better-paying professions for a smaller pool of potential workers as the United States experiences a shortage of skilled workers in the 1990s. It has been argued that the single most important school-related predictor of children's academic performance is the quality of the teachers they have.[77]

Children's academic performance is also largely conditioned by family background and home environment. While some trends, such as the increase in family disruption, would appear negative, the continued improvement in parental education and the decline in average family size both augur well for the future. Although there is some disagreement about the magnitude of the effect, research has shown that the fewer the number of siblings, the greater a child's verbal ability and the more years of school he or she eventually completes.[78] Demographer Judith Blake has shown that, although U.S. fertility has been low for some time, small families, in which children grow up with only one or two siblings, are a relatively recent phenomenon. She argues that, as more children raised in these small families go through school, average academic performance will improve.[79]

Other Aspects of Well-Being

Children's Health

In many ways, the physical health of American children has never been better. Although the U.S. infant mortality rate remains higher than in most other industrialized countries, both infant and child mortality rates have dropped significantly since 1960 (see Table 8). When parents are asked to assess the overall health of their children, the vast majority rate their children's physical health as very good or excellent.[80] Many serious illnesses, such as diphtheria and polio, have been greatly reduced through widespread inoculation campaigns. Most children may not enter school unless they have been vaccinated against several major childhood diseases.

Despite the improvements in child

Table 8. Infant Mortality Rates and Death Rates for Children under Age 15, for Blacks and Whites, 1960–1987

	Infant mortality rate (Deaths per 1,000 births)			Death rate (deaths per 100,000)					
				Ages 1–4			Ages 5–14		
	Total	Blacks	Whites	Total	Blacks	Whites	Total	Blacks	Whites
1960	26.0	44.3	22.9	109	191	95	47	65	44
1970	20.0	32.6	17.8	85	140	75	41	56	39
1980	12.6	21.4	11.0	64	98	58	31	39	29
1987	10.1	17.9	8.6	52	68	49	26	36	24

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, "Advance Report of Final Mortality Statistics, 1987," *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Vol. 38, No. 5, Tables 2 and 3.

health, the health status of low-income, minority children, especially those living in central cities or rural areas is below the average. Black infants are twice as likely to die or to be of low birth weight as are white infants. Low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams or 5.5 pounds at birth) is associated with serious, and costly, health problems for children. At older ages, too, black children have higher death rates than whites, although the gap has narrowed considerably since 1960 (see Table 8).

Inadequate medical care for pregnant women and children, especially blacks and teenage mothers, is associated with the lower health status and higher mortality of minority children. Some experts estimate that as many as 1 in 10 infant deaths could be prevented by medical intervention. But many poor families, especially the working poor who often are not enrolled in welfare programs, do not have easy access to regular medical care. According to the Census Bureau, some 37 million Americans had no health insurance in 1986; 24 million of these were from families with an employed adult.

Although the percentage of adolescents using drugs and alcohol appears to have declined since the early 1980s, occasional drug and alcohol use among teenagers remains widespread. More than one-half of all students will try an illicit substance by the time they are high school seniors, according to recent estimates.

Emotional and Psychological Health

Some researchers see evidence that the emotional and psychological well-being of American children is deteriorating, citing rising adolescent suicide rates and a growing proportion of children who are said to have had seriously disturbing experiences or need special educational assistance from the schools because of chronic emotional problems. However, the majority of children do not report that they are depressed or unhappy with their lives. In fact, most children are quite happy with their family lives despite the increase in family disruption. Also, the subjective measures of happiness for children and youth have not changed markedly during the past decade.[81]

Children and the Future

What is the value of children? For society, it is obvious. They represent the next generation of workers and embody each nation's hope for a continued, perhaps improved, existence. For parents, they offer fulfillment, the opportunity to care for and help mold the personality of another human being, but they also demand a great deal of time, money, attention, and self-sacrifice.

Whether the cost of children will continue to be outweighed by their benefit to individuals and families can be debated. The emphasis on individual fulfillment in the United States may come in conflict with the very essence of raising children: the need to place the interests of others first.

Economic factors, such as the stagnation in male wages since the mid-1970s, the high price of housing, the difficulty of finding good quality, affordable child care, and the increased costs of a college education have profoundly altered the labor force, marriage, and childbearing decisions of individuals. Couples are waiting longer to marry and have children, having fewer children, and more often divorcing before those children reach adulthood. Mothers as well as fathers find it increasingly necessary to be in the labor force to assure an adequate standard of living for their children.

Some of the indicators of children's well-being during the past two decades are sobering, but others provide an optimistic picture and offer hopeful signs for the future of U.S. children. First, the

baby-boom generation is making up for some of the childbearing foregone earlier in their lives. Predictions of childlessness and large scale abandonment of family life for this generation, a generation supposedly obsessed with individual fulfillment and achievement, will not be realized. Women and men today may be moving more slowly toward meeting their childbearing goals than their parents and, either by choice or necessity, they may be combining family and work responsibilities in ways not envisioned 30 years ago, but they are not all giving up childrearing.

Nor are most children being shortchanged in terms of what money can buy, although there is some cause for concern in that inequality in the material well-being of children appears to be increasing. Whether children are being neglected in terms of the time parents spend with them is harder to assess. Despite the increase in maternal employment and father absence, both of which negatively affect the amount of time children spend with parents, there is evidence of a continued, almost surprisingly high level of family involvement in the caring of young children and of school-age children when they are not in school.

The educational attainment of blacks appears to have kept pace, even improved slightly, when compared with whites, despite the widening racial differences in family lives of black and white children. However, most of the improvement in academic skills of American children has been among the low-achieving students. There has been little real gain among the best and brightest students, leaving the United States at a disadvantage internationally.

On other aspects of children's well-being the evidence is mixed: their physical health is probably better than ever but their psychological well-being may not be. Still, most children report healthy, happy lives and satisfaction with their family. This, as much as anything, portends well for the future.

Today's children are being shaped differently from yesterday's children. They will have spent considerably more time in group settings, cared for by individuals other than their parents. They will have more frequently observed that mothers, as well as fathers, leave for work each day. More of them will see their father, and in some cases their mother, move out of their household and will be forced to deal with the trauma this entails. They will have fewer siblings with whom to compete but also from whom to learn and share.

Will children today be better or worse off than their parents? Part of the answer rests on the commitment by the public and by parents to ensure the well-being of the children. Children traditionally embody their parents' hope for a better life, and their country's wish for a more resourceful and productive citizenry. They also reflect the strength and values of the society that produces them; their well-being exemplifies the country's well-being; their future is the country's future. □

Judy Burr

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Discussion Points

1. Compare and contrast the parenting experiences of baby boomers to those of their own parents.

2. Compare the proportion of children in the population to the proportion of elderly for the past, present, and future. How do changes affect distribution of resources and services (e.g. schools, social services, medical centers, etc.)?

3. Outline the changes that have taken place in children's home environments since 1960 (living arrangements, parent's labor force participation).

4. What factors contribute to lower family incomes in never-married households? Describe the differences in income among never-married, divorced, separated, and widowed mother-only families.

5. What factors affect the length of time that a child might spend in poverty?

6. Discuss the impact that changes in the number of children in the family, the educational attainment of the parents, and the labor force status of the mother have had on the well-being of children.

7. Explain the causes for the change in the proportion of children living in poverty between 1970 and today.

8. Compare and contrast the child-care arrangements for children in families where the mother is employed full time to those in families where the mother holds a part-time job.

9. Discuss the well-being of children in relation to the elderly, their parents' generation, and children in other countries (both developed and less developed).

10. Describe some of the policies that have been suggested concerning the well-being of children. What are their merits and drawbacks? What kind of policies would you endorse?

Prepared by Kimberly A. Crews

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